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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000342

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: 250 ACTIVISTS CONVICTED IN ONE DAY, KOZULIN BEATEN

REF: A. MINSK 331

[1](#)B. MINSK 307

[1](#)C. MINSK 337

Classified By: Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: As of March 27, approximately 250 people who were detained for participating in post-March 19 election protests were sentenced to up to 15 days in jail. Those sentenced included former presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich's stepson, a former Polish ambassador to Belarus, Russian political activists, and Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian journalists. Several detained opposition leaders drafted a statement, signed by 500 detainees, that blamed Lukashenko for falsifying election results and called on the international community to use all available tools against the Lukashenko regime. A lawyer was finally granted access to see presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin at the Zhodino detention center. According to a campaign manager, a severely beaten Kozulin needs medical attention and is still suffering from pain. News sources also report that detainees at the Zhodino detention center went on a hunger strike. Court cases are to resume on March 28. End Summary.

Prosecutions Continue

[1](#)2. (SBU) Human rights lawyer Vladimir Labkovich informed Post on March 28 that nine Minsk district courts convicted approximately 250 people (Radio Liberty reports 293) for participating in post-election rallies (reftels). Most sentences were 10 - 15 days in jail. The majority of those prosecuted were detained on March 24 when security forces razed the tent city on October Square. Forty-five minors were arrested at the time and later released without charges.

[1](#)3. (U) On March 27, human rights lawyer Valentin Stefanovich told independent news source Belapan that the exact number of those arrested or sentenced was unknown, as judges were not releasing information or allowing observers into the courtroom. According to Stefanovich, Zavodski District Court authorities physically removed Labkovich from the premises and Judge Vera Tupik of the Leninski District Court refused to allow OSCE observers in the courtroom.

Milinkevich's Step Son Sentenced

[1](#)4. (U) A Frunzenskiy District Court judge on March 27 sentenced 10 Coalition presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich's stepson Igor Kulei to 15 days in jail for participating in an unsanctioned meeting and shouting antigovernment slogans. Milinkevich's wife Inna Kulei was

allowed to attend her son's hearing. Igor's girlfriend Victoria Sakharuk was sentenced to seven days in jail for participating in an unsanctioned meeting.

Foreigners Sentenced, Some Deported

15. (U) The Leninski District Court on March 27 sentenced former Polish ambassador to Belarus Mariush Mashkevich to 15 days in jail for participating in an unsanctioned meeting. He was arrested on March 24 during the tent city razing. The same court sentenced three Russians, Oleg Kazlovski and Eduard Glezin of the Russian youth movement Oborona and journalist/human rights activist Aleksandr Podrobinyek, to 15 days in jail for the same charge. Two out of seven Ukrainians arrested in last week's protests were sentenced to 15 days, one is awaiting trial, and the remaining four were deported to Ukraine and banned from entering Belarus for five years. Belarusian journalist Pavel Sheremet was unexpectedly released from the Okryestina detention center on March 27 and ordered to leave Belarus within 24 hours. He too is banned from entering Belarus for five years. Polish journalist Veranika Smolinskaya was sentenced to 10 days in jail, Georgian reporter Nino Georgobiani was sentenced to five days, and her cameraman Georgi Lagidze was sentenced to 15 days. All were arrested on March 24 when police units raided the tent village on October Square. Trials are to resume on March 28.

Detainees Release Statement, Go on Hunger Strike

16. (U) On March 27, the United Civic Party's (UCP) website published a statement written by jailed UCP leader Anatoly

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Lebedko, UCP deputy head Aleksandr Dobrovolsky, and deputy heads of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) Aleksei Yanukevich and Valery Mazinski, and signed by 500 detainees at Okryestina detention center. They accused Lukashenko of conducting one of Europe's most "cynical" and "shameless" presidential campaigns in history and lambasted Lukashenko for falsifying results and using weapons against his people. The detainees called themselves political prisoners, urged the international community to use all means necessary against the regime, and demanded the resignation of Interior Minister General Vladimir Naumov and BKGB Chief Stepan Sukharenko. The statement asked Belarusians to unite against Lukashenko and stressed that victory was inevitable. The independent online news source Belarus Partizan reported on March 27 that at least 20 detainees located at a Zhodino detention center (30 miles east of Minsk) went on a hunger strike to protest their arrest.

Kozulin Beaten

17. (C) A Kozulin campaign manager Oleg Volchek told Poloff on March 28 that a lawyer was allowed to meet with Kozulin at the detention center in Zhodino. According to Volchek, Kozulin is suffering from severe headaches and back and knee pain after being beaten by security forces on March 25. Volchek claims that after Kozulin spoke with SOBR Commander Dmitry Pavlichenko on March 25, he turned his back on the latter, who with full-force kicked Kozulin in the tailbone. At that moment, Pavlichenko's four bodyguards continued beating Kozulin until he was taken to the Zavodsky police station. Once there, paramedics suggested to the authorities that Kozulin be taken to a hospital, but security forces refused and transported him to the detention center in Zhodino. Kozulin explained that the ALMAZ anti-terrorist officers that transported him forced him onto his knees, put his face on the seat, and hooked his handcuffed hands to a rack. In this painful position, the ALMAZ officers beat Kozulin in the tailbone and back of the head until they reached the detention center while telling him that they were

going to shoot him in the woods and that they &were not through with him.8

¶8. (C) Volchek is very worried about Kozulin,s health and fate should he remain in the custody without proper medical care and fears that he could be &liquidated.8 Volchek asked us to issue a statement condemning Kozulin,s treatment and to see what we could do in giving Kozulin the needed medical care. According to Volchek, the authorities have ten days to hold Kozulin without pressing charges and will most likely charge him for hooliganism in connection with his March 2 beating. He is currently being held on suspicion of organizing a mass protest.

Comment

¶9. (U) Trials are expected to continue throughout the week as 1,000 people have reportedly been detained since the March 19 presidential elections. Court hearings continue to be quick and closed to the public with no acquittals reported. As the number of convictions mounts, the question remains where and how the detainees will serve their time, as Minsk's detention centers are already overcrowded and having trouble taking care of all the prisoners.
Krol